

Week 1

# It's about God



It's about God – the one from whom we have received every good thing and for whose glory we live, and breathe and serve.

Our stewardship response begins when we realize and accept God's unconditional love for us. We demonstrate our thankfulness for God's gifts when we respond generously to the needs of others – sharing freely from that which has been freely given to us.



**Everence**

## Our only true treasure

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.  
– *Matthew 6:21*

### Read

Matthew 6:19-34

### Reflect

As a child, stories about misers fascinated me. Such people were often depicted gloating over gold in the glow of a dim light. Ebenezer Scrooge, the lead character in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, probably tops the list of confirmed misers. This unhappy, lonely man was consumed with accumulating earthly treasure. Scrooge's heart, thoughts and efforts were focused on building up his assets. And as Dickens made clear, this is not an alluring picture. If you think about it, money and possessions are not what make your life fulfilling and meaningful.

In the Scripture passage open before you, Jesus focuses on finances. Yet many other things can be one's true treasure, including pleasure, work, fame, family connections, social position. What is your passion and how can you tell if it is focused on true treasure?

Jesus urged those who came to him to "seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness." (Matthew 6:33) In his stories and through his teachings, Jesus challenged his followers back to true treasure, knowing that the ever-present tinsel of life is a dangerous enticement. How can you better reject the lure of the tinsel in order to keep your heart in passionate pursuit of the only true treasure?

### Pray

Lord, I admit I am easily attracted to earthly glory. Money, fame and other interests consume my attention. Forgive me for wandering away from you and into the arms of false treasures. Free me to seek only true treasure, and to that may my heart and thoughts be constantly drawn. Amen.

### Act

Discuss with a family member or trustworthy friend how your life can be oriented around true treasure and the possible implications of such a commitment on your giving, your work, your relationships and your priorities.

– *Harvey Sider*

## Our refuge in times of trouble

How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you.

– *Psalm 31:19*

### Read

Psalm 31:19-24

### Reflect

Our commitment to follow Jesus doesn't make us immune from times when life brings more than we think we can bear. Sometimes it is the small, pesky annoyances – a lost billfold, water in the basement, or a missed flight – that get us down. Other times we are hit with really big issues: a life threatening illness, unemployment, a prodigal child, an aging parent, marital strife. Whether big or small, life's challenges are usually manageable if faced individually. However, when troubles come in quick succession, we can feel besieged and alone.

The evil one is delighted if, in our alarm, we perceive ourselves to be cut off from God. Discouragement is the trick of the devil. But we need not fall prey to Satan's tricks.

Psalm 31 provides a word of encouragement in times of distress. God has stored up great goodness for those who fear him. When our emotional and spiritual reserves are at their lowest, we can draw from God's rich storehouse. We find refuge in the shelter of his presence. "Be strong and take heart," the Psalmist urges.

How wonderful to know that our God is more than able to see us through! When troubles come, we can turn to him. He is our hope and our refuge.

### Pray

Precious God, my refuge and hope. So often I long to be sheltered and protected. I praise you that I can turn to you in prayer! I rejoice in the great goodness you have stored up for those who fear you. And I praise you for your wonderful love for me. Amen.

### Act

Think back on a time when you felt like a "besieged city." On the notes page at the end of this booklet, list the ways God showed his goodness to you during that time. Include God's work in your life through others.

– *Rebekah Burch Basinger*

## Boasting in the right thing

For who makes you different than everybody else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

– *I Corinthians 4:7*

### Read

I Corinthians 4:7-14

### Reflect

The church at Corinth was racked with conflicting loyalties and claims to fame. Paul reminded the church that there is no human basis for pride. “What makes you think you are different from everybody else? After all, everything you have comes from God,” he wrote.

We 21st century Christians are not so different from those early believers. We boast in our abilities, our upbringing, our educational background, forgetting that these are gifts from God. We would not be where we are without the constant and countless interventions of God.

God’s greatest gift, of course, is his only Son as a sacrifice for our sins and mistakes. Salvation is the most precious gift any of us will ever receive, and we have done nothing to deserve it. The truth is, our natural bent is rebellion against God, and yet Christ died for us, carried our sins, and gave us his holiness.

He didn’t have to do it. His is a gift of grace. We are his children, and he loves us with an unconditional love. He gives us what we need and what we can use to further his kingdom and to spread his grace even more. When we forget Jesus’ sacrifice, we become selfish and full of pride.

### Pray

Give me a renewed and joyful heart, dear God. As the words from Psalm 100 remind me, it is you who made me, and I am yours. Thank you for including me among your people, for being my shepherd, and for inviting me to “graze” in your bountiful pastures. Amen.

### Act

For today, make a conscious effort to think about your possessions as though they belonged to someone else. Notice whether you find yourself treating the things in your life differently.

– *Doug Sider, Jr.*

## Our source of security

If I have put my trust in gold or said to pure gold, “You are my security,” if I have rejoiced over my great wealth, the fortune my hands had gained, ... then these also would be sins to be judged, for I would have been unfaithful to God on high.

– *Job 31:24-25, 28*

### Read

Job 31:16-28

### Reflect

What would it be like to have the personal commendation of the Almighty – to be identified by God as “the finest person in all the earth, an individual of complete integrity”? That’s how God described Job, and for good reason. Nothing, absolutely nothing, was more important to Job than his relationship with God. Even when he lost everything – his wealth, his health and his family – Job’s heart remained fixed on what pleases God. As a result, Job brought joy to God and reaped great rewards in this life and the life to come.

We live in a materialistic culture where more is deemed better. Every new day becomes a quest for more money, a bigger home, a better car, more luxury toys, that cottage, that cruise – the list goes on. And we Christians are not immune. Just like everyone else, we are working to amass goods and a secure financial future. We’ve placed our trust in money. Our security is tied up in what we have. We act as though we can buy happiness.

Long before Jesus promised that seeking God first is the best way to see all our needs met, Job actually lived it out. That same security is available to you and me today.

### Pray

Lord, help me resist being squeezed into the mold of this world. Help me live this life holding things lightly and holding on to you tightly. Help me invest generously in things that make an eternal difference, so I can know true security, peace, and joy both now and forever. Amen.

### Act

Ask yourself whether your life reflects a daily dependence on God. Is your security firmly fixed in him? Are you laying up treasures in heaven where they will be eternal? Decide to use some of the resources God has entrusted to you to do something today that will result in eternal benefits.

– *Tim Harden*

## Whom we serve

No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

– *Matthew 6:24*

### Read

Matthew 6:24

### Reflect

By any measure, we North Americans are the richest people who ever lived. Yet we constantly clamor for more. It is as though the word “enough” is missing from our vocabularies. Too late, we discover that “more” is a ruthless master.

Here in the sixth chapter of Matthew, Jesus warns that no one can serve two masters – that we cannot serve both God and money. His words challenge us to an honest assessment of what our lives are all about, and that is not easy. It requires that we face up to some tough questions:

- Do I live contentedly within my means or continually burden myself with consumer debt?
- Do I give freely and liberally (at least a tithe) or repeatedly take on other financial obligations that prohibit this?
- Am I holding onto a large account that could be tapped to benefit ministry or charitable purposes?
- Does my life reflect a healthy balance between work, church, and leisure, or is it largely consumed with efforts to earn and have more?
- Do I buy things (such as a car) for their usefulness or for their status?

Answers to questions such as these provide clues to the real master in our lives.

### Pray

Lord, may my whole heart be yours alone. Teach me to manage my resources with an unselfishness that honors you and channels your blessing to others. Amen.

### Act

Set aside any extra or unexpected money received during the week as a giving fund. Draw on this, as the Holy Spirit leads, to supply special needs in God’s work and in the lives of the less fortunate.

– *Robert Verno*

## It's about God

"It is an anomaly of modern life that many find giving to be a burden. Such people have omitted a preliminary gift. If one first gives of himself to the Lord, then all other giving is easy."

– John S. Bonnell (1893-1992), pastor and author

### Coming together

15 minutes

1. Take a moment to share a bit about yourself. Talk about where you live and work, your family, how long you have lived in this community, etc.
2. What are one or two things you really enjoy doing?
3. How long have you attended church here?
4. Why did you decide to join this group study?
5. What do you hope to learn and accomplish by completing this four-week study?

### Learning together

40 minutes

#### *Read Scripture and discuss*

A certain ruler asked Jesus, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good – except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'" "All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said. When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God." Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God." Peter said to him, "We have left all we had to follow you!" "I tell you the truth," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the Kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life." (Luke 18:18-30)

"Sometimes people come to Jesus for life insurance – they would rather not lose everything to death. But Jesus' call is one step deeper, beyond possessions to the real self." (Life Applications Commentary)

1. The man who approached Jesus sought the answer to a great question: How can I have eternal life? Discuss whether this man truly wanted a life transformation or just wanted to add one more possession to his already extensive collection of stuff.
2. What do you think were the man's motives in calling Jesus "good teacher?"
3. When he first answered the man's question, Jesus listed only five of the commandments, five related to human relationships. Why do you think he did this?
4. What does this man's commitment to these five commandments, in contrast to his sense that something is lacking, indicate about his faith?

5. Give examples of ways we tend to live as if faith is little more than self-improvement and becoming a socially acceptable person. Do we tend to view faith as something we add to a list of characteristics defining who we are? In what ways are we similar to the rich young ruler?
6. Jesus tells the young man to give all he has to the poor. What was Christ trying to get at in this man's life?
7. How do we fully follow Christ today? What does it look like to live fully surrendered to God in a wealthy, materialistic society?

"What is impossible with men is possible with God." (Luke 18:27)

**Sharing together** 10 minutes

In Romans 12:1, Paul says to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice. How does this concept of being a living sacrifice impact the way you handle the possessions God has entrusted to you?

Where in your life do you need to make changes so as not to lose sight of the eternal and to ensure that all of your life is offered to God as a living sacrifice?

**Praying together** 10 minutes

An important part of a small group is learning to care for the needs of others by praying for one another. Take a moment at the close of tonight's session to discuss how you feel about sharing your praises, needs, concerns and struggles with this group.

Sitting in a circle, go around and share an item of praise and thanksgiving or a challenge you are facing in the week ahead. After everyone has shared, take turns praying for the person on your right. If you are uncomfortable praying out loud, simply pray quietly and then say "amen" when you are done.

Record the praises and concerns mentioned within your small group. This will help you to remember the other people in your group throughout the week during your devotion times.

Name	Praise or concern



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